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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

**Future COIN, Present Doctrine: Assessing U.S. Counterinsurgency Guidance at the
Operational Level of War**

by

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the
requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily
endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'WR Peterson', enclosed in a light gray rectangular box.

03 May 2010

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Abstract

Over the last decade, military counterinsurgent (COIN) operations have risen to a place of prominence. Much of the U.S. COIN doctrine was derived from an analysis of major COIN operations in the last century, before the rise of transnational terror groups fomenting uprisings fueled by radical ideologies. This paper will explore the basis for contemporary COIN principles, analyze the essential differences between historical and contemporary insurgencies, and discuss the adequacy of current COIN doctrine. Finally, the paper will offer recommendations for additional factors the commander should consider in planning for future COIN operations.

INTRODUCTION

The conflict results from the action of the insurgent aiming to seize power... and from the reaction of the counterinsurgent aiming to keep his power.

—David Galula

Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice

In the first decade of the 21st century, the United States has engaged in a campaign of conventional and counterinsurgency (COIN) warfare —primarily in the countries of Afghanistan and Iraq—in order to reduce the existential threat of transnational terrorism fueled by religious and ethnic extremism. In view of the challenges that COIN warfare presents, the U.S. military has had to relearn the lessons from historical insurgencies and design new doctrine to deal with a different kind of insurgent adversary. The fundamental question that must be answered regarding the adequacy of this new doctrine is in three parts: (1) has the basis (or central motivation) for insurgencies changed, (2) if so, does a shift in insurgent motivation require different COIN strategy, operations, and tactics?, and (3) does current COIN doctrine adequately support the planning process for future COIN operations? This paper will argue that in the last several years, an important shift in insurgent motivation has occurred, that the shift in motivation demands a concomitant change in COIN strategy, and that current U.S. COIN doctrine inadequately addresses some crucial elements of future COIN operations. In order to establish that a shift in insurgent motivation has occurred, this paper will broadly analyze 20th century insurgencies in terms of their political aims and principal motivators, then focus on two major historical examples (Algeria 1954-1962 and Vietnam 1958-1975 as representative of the majority of 20th century insurgencies) to determine effective strategies, operations, and tactics in the form of lessons learned. The paper will then contrast these historical operations with contemporary military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq (as representative of the most likely form of insurgency the operational

commander will face in the future) to examine the operational impact of a shift in insurgent motivation. The paper will finish with an analysis of current U.S. COIN doctrine (contained in U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24 and U.S. Joint Publication 3-24) in order to determine its suitability for future COIN planning, and where needed offering recommendations for improvement.

BACKGROUND

Nations on every continent have experienced or intervened in insurgencies.

—Kalev Sepp

Best Practices in Counterinsurgency

An insurgency is defined as “the organized use of subversion and violence by a group or movement that seeks to overthrow or force change of a governing authority”.¹

Worldwide, during the 20th century nations and their governments have responded to more than fifty insurgency actions.² Professor Bard O’Neill, director of studies of insurgencies and revolution at the National War College, theorizes that insurgencies fall into the following nine categories: Anarchist, Egalitarian, Traditionalist, Apocalyptic/Utopian, Pluralist, Secessionist, Reformist, Preservationist, and Commercialist. O’Neill explains that the first five categories represent groups with revolutionary aims, the sixth (Secessionist) encompasses groups whose aim is to create a new political entity/state (or join a different one), and the final three categories represent groups whose aims are to effect change within the existing political system. Under O’Neill’s classification system, the vast majority of 20th century insurgencies are either Egalitarian or Secessionist. 20th Century Egalitarian movements are closely aligned with Marxist/Maoist ideology— the movements seek central

2. Joint Publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 05 October 2009, I-1.

3. Sepp, 8-9.

control of wealth and resources—while Secessionist movements have nationalist/separatist aims. Examples of the former category include the Vietcong in South Vietnam, the Huks in the Philippines, the Malayan Communist Party, and a host of smaller Marxist/ Maoist insurgencies in Central America; examples of the latter category include the National Liberation Front in Algeria, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, Chechen groups in Russia, the IRA in Northern Ireland, as well as various anti-colonial liberation movements throughout Africa and Asia. O'Neill explains that Egalitarian insurgencies were “a familiar part of the post-World War II international political landscape” and that “[s]ecessionists have been among the most notable insurgents” during the same period.³ O'Neill goes on to caution, “traditionalist insurgents...have posed the greatest threat in the early twenty-first century” and that these groups “seek to restore a political system from the recent or distant past.”⁴ Examples of Traditionalist groups include Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Palestinian territories, Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Southeast Asia, and Al Qaeda⁵. Using O'Neill's construct, it becomes apparent that the basis for insurgencies has indeed shifted—away from Marxist/Maoist struggles against democratic governments; away from anti-colonial movements attempting to break free from hegemonic rule—toward groups generally aligned under the *Salafist* ideal of pure Islamic rule as dictated by the Koran and codified under *sharia* law⁶. Other categorization schemes are generally in agreement

4. Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2005), 20-29. The author presents an excellent discussion of nearly every type of insurgent group, their strategic aims, and political goals. Some categories (Anarchist, Apocalyptic/Utopian, Pluralist) represent a small number of isolated insurgencies, while the final three categories (Reformist, Preservationist, and Commercialist) represent limited insurgent movements unlikely to prompt large-scale military action.

5. Ibid, 21.

5. Ibid, 21-22.

7. Matthew Morgan, "The Origins of New Terrorism", *Parameters*, Spring 2004: 29-43, 31-35 The author expands on the nature of radical Islamist terrorist groups, drawing parallels to radical cults like Aum Shinrikyo and even Christian extremist groups.

with this analysis.⁷ In order to determine the operational effect of this shift in insurgent motivation, it will be useful to examine lessons derived from two historical insurgencies, Algeria (Secessionist) and Vietnam (Egalitarian). These two cases are representative of 20th century insurgencies and lessons from these engagements were fundamental to the development of contemporary COIN doctrine⁸.

Algeria (1954 to 1962)

...the news that the “authorities” had withdrawn from Algiers...produced an unexpectedly powerful effect on the insurgents...

—Sir Alistair Horne
A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962

From 1954 to 1962, the Algerian separatist group *Front de Liberation Nationale* (FLN – National Liberation Front) waged an unconventional war against France in an (ultimately successful) effort to win Algerian independence. In addition to conventional operations against the military arm of the movement (FLA), the French employed a “three-pronged counterinsurgency approach (destructive, political-psychological, constructive operations)” under the emerging doctrine of *La guerre révolutionnaire*.⁹ The central effort of this doctrine was to isolate and protect the Algerian population from the insurgents – in effect establishing the civilian population as a center of gravity. In 1962, following a near-unanimous referendum on Algerian sovereignty and under significant political pressure, the French government under Charles de Gaulle capitulated to Algerian demands, declared Algeria a free nation, and withdrew.

8. Audrey Cronin, "Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Winter, 2002-2003: 30-58, 39. See also John Waghelstein and Donald Chisholm, "Analyzing Insurgency" (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, February 2006).

9. David Kilcullen, "Counter-insurgency Redux " *Survival*, Vol. 48, Issue 4 , December 2006: 111 – 130, 111.

10. Jason Norton, "The French-Algerian War and FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency: A Comparison" Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, December 14, 2007 39-44.

A French Army colonel during the Algerian War (and a canonized counterinsurgency expert¹⁰), David Galula identified a number of lessons (what he termed Laws and Principles) from the French experience in Algeria. In articulating his laws, Galula argued that “the support of the population is as necessary to the counterinsurgent as it is to the insurgent”, that popular support is gained by influencing an “active minority” of the population, that “support from the population is conditional” and can be influenced by either side, and finally, that the counterinsurgent effort must be “intense” while its means must be “vast”.¹¹ To complement these laws, Galula opined that counterinsurgent efforts should follow the following principles: economy of forces (while the amount of resources and personnel must be vast, COIN forces should be focused against the main insurgent effort), irreversibility (the point at which popular support of the counterinsurgency is solidified), seize the initiative (keep the insurgents on the defensive or cause them to disperse), fully utilize all COIN assets (use advantages in administration, economics and firepower), simplicity of action (in order to maintain popular understanding and support), and unity of command (political efforts synchronized with military operations under a single leader).¹² Galula’s primer for counterinsurgent efforts forms the bedrock of U.S. COIN doctrine.¹³ To complete our analysis of the lessons that historical insurgencies may present, we will next examine the U.S. COIN efforts during the Vietnam War.

11. Frank Hoffman, “Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency?” *Parameters*, Summer 2007: 71-87, 71. See also Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 465.

12. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 1964), 52-55.

13. *Ibid*, 56-59.

13. U.S. Army Field Manual, *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, December 2006), viii. Galula is one of only three authors (Sir Robert Thompson and Dan Baum are the others) specifically acknowledged in the front matter while more than fifty authors are listed in the bibliography.

Vietnam (1959 to 1975)

The proof that the Viet Cong guerrillas were not a center of gravity was demonstrated during Tet-68, when, even though they were virtually destroyed, the war continued unabated.

—Harry Summers

On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War

From 1959 to 1975, North Vietnam (supported by China and Russia) waged a conventional war against South Vietnam (supported by the United States and other allies) and directed and supplied an armed insurgent group—the Vietcong (or National Liberation Front)—to conduct asymmetrical operations in South Vietnam.¹⁴ A discussion of the conventional military strategy, operations, and tactics as well as the political considerations and machinations on both sides of the conflict is outside the scope of this paper. Instead, our analysis will focus on the aims of the insurgents and the operations undertaken by the counterinsurgent forces.

The insurgents' mission was to increase civil unrest, increase dissatisfaction with the South Vietnamese regime, and increase support for a Communist unification of Vietnam. The most successful COIN operation in Vietnam was a program called Civil Operations and Revolutionary—later Rural—Development Support (CORDS). The U.S. Army Field Manual on Counterinsurgency (FM 3-24) details the keys to the success of the CORDS program:

The effectiveness of CORDS was a function of integrated civilian and military teams at every level of society in Vietnam. From district to province to national level, U.S. advisors and U.S. interagency partners worked closely with their Vietnamese counterparts.... Keen attention was given to the ultimate objective of serving the needs of the local populace. Success in meeting basic needs of the populace led, in turn, to improved intelligence that facilitated an assault on the Viet Cong political infrastructure.¹⁵

15. O'Neill, 180.

16. FM 3-24, 2-13.

The Army credits the CORDS program with isolating the bulk of the rural Vietnamese population from the Viet Cong insurgency, effectively negating Viet Cong influence, and forcing the North Vietnamese to employ their conventional forces in more unconventional roles.¹⁶ This example of tactical and operational success in combating an insurgent force is offered as a model for future COIN operations, even though the eventual outcome of the Vietnam War—following a U.S. withdrawal of combat forces and cessation of political and economic aid—was an eventual North Vietnamese victory.

The lessons drawn from Galula’s experience in Algeria and the U.S. COIN efforts in Vietnam are encapsulated in U.S. Army COIN doctrine as the so-called “Historical Principles for Counterinsurgency”:

(1) Legitimacy [of the government] is the Main Objective, (2) Unity of Effort is Essential, (3) Political Factors Are Primary, (4) Counterinsurgents Must Understand the [societal and cultural] Environment, (5) Intelligence Drives Operations, (6) Insurgents Must be Isolated from Their Cause and Support, (7) Security Under the Rule of Law is Essential, and (8) Counterinsurgents Should Prepare for a Long-Term Commitment.¹⁷

In articulating these principles, FM 3-24 attempts to provide “some guideposts for forces engaged in COIN operations” while recognizing that “COIN operations are complicated, and even following the principles and imperatives does not guarantee success.”¹⁸ In the next two sections, this paper will examine a pair of Traditionalist insurgencies (Afghanistan and Iraq) in order to provide a basis for discussion of the efficacy of the proceeding historical principles of counterinsurgency and the adequacy of current operational doctrine for future COIN operations.

16. FM 3-24, 2-13.

17. Ibid, 1-20 to 1-24

18. Ibid, 1-20.

Afghanistan (2001 to Present)

On my order, U.S. forces have begun strikes on terrorist camps of al Qaeda, and the military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

—President George W. Bush

A televised speech from the White House, September 2001

In October 2001, a U.S.-led coalition of forces began a conventional warfare campaign against the ruling Taliban regime in Afghanistan. U.S. intelligence assessed that the Taliban were a “crucial external supporter”¹⁹ of Al Qaeda – a transnational organization responsible for the September 11, 2001 terror attacks in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania. The coalition forces targeted “terrorist facilities and various Taliban military and political assets within Afghanistan”²⁰ and with the assistance of indigenous Afghan fighters, took Kabul (the Afghan capital) the following month. Over the next three years, coalition forces provided security and support as the Afghans rebuilt their government – an effort that resulted in the ratification of a new constitution in December 2004. Over the last five years (2005 to present), the new Afghan administration has struggled against a rising insurgency comprised of resurgent Taliban forces, foreign fighters (available as the conflict in Iraq wound down), and local *Mujahidin*. U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal, commander of the International Assistance Security Force (ISAF), explained the composition of the insurgency as follows:

“Most insurgent fighters are Afghans. They are directed by a small number of Afghan senior leaders based in Pakistan that work through an alternative infrastructure in Afghanistan. They are aided by foreign fighters, elements of some intelligence agencies, and international funding, resources, and training. Foreign fighters provide materiel, expertise, and ideological commitment.”²¹

19. O'Neill, 183.

20. U.S. Department of State, "*Background Note: Afghanistan*," (U.S. Government, March 26, 2010).

21. Stanley McChrystal, "*COMISAF's Initial Assessment*," 30 August, 2009, 2-5.

The Taliban insurgency is attempting to create a “shadow government” in place of the “national government and traditional power structures”.²² The insurgents conduct military operations designed to delegitimize, undermine, and weaken the central government as well as the coalition forces providing support to COIN efforts.²³ In the body of his report, General McChrystal embraces a return to what he terms “Population-centric COIN”²⁴ – an approach that embodies the historical COIN principles discussed earlier. McChrystal entreats his forces to “Improve Understanding” (of the Afghan people), “Build Relationships (with the population and government), “Project Confidence” (to bolster security efforts and reassure the populace), “Decentralize” (to increase initiative of military forces and civilian agencies), improve “Re-integration and Reconciliation” efforts, and provide “Economic Support to Counterinsurgency” by leveraging resource advantages.²⁵ None of these focus areas represent even a minimal—let alone radical—departure from Galula’s previously articulated principles and laws of COIN.

Perhaps one reason that a more conventional COIN approach can succeed against this Traditionalist insurgency is due both to the nature of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (described as “not so much a case of state-sponsored terrorism but of a terrorist-sponsored state”²⁶), and the relative strength of Afghani tribal structures.²⁷ The Taliban had been previously successful in imposing “an extreme interpretation of Islam--based upon the rural Pashtun tribal code--on the entire country”²⁸ – loosely controlling more than 90% of the country, but not governing in any real sense. In the next section, we will discuss COIN

22. McChrystal, 2-5.

23. Ibid, 2-6.

24. Ibid, 2-12.

25. Ibid, 2-12 to 2-14.

26. Lawrence Freedman, *"The Third World War?"* Survival, Vol. 43, Winter 2001-02: 61-88, 74.

27. U.S. Department of State, *"Background Note: Iraq."* March 8, 2010.

28. Ibid.

operations conducted in Iraq during the U.S.-led Operation Iraqi Freedom and introduce a number of elements that greatly increased the difficulty of the COIN effort.

Iraq (2002 to 2009)

In short, today, there is a renewed cause for hope in Iraq, but that hope is resting on an emerging foundation.

—President Barack Obama

A speech delivered at Camp Lejeune, NC, February 2009

In March 2003, a U.S.-led military coalition conducted a relatively short conventional campaign to overthrow the government of Iraq and remove its Ba’athist government. This action was justified by citing Iraq’s historical non-compliance with a variety of UN resolutions dating back more than a decade (the First Gulf War), as well as its refusal to submit to international inspections to determine the country’s WMD capability.²⁹ In the vacuum of government that followed, the coalition forces committed a series of ill-planned and poorly coordinated actions that contributed to the formation of an insurgency. Chief among these missteps was the disbanding of the Iraqi army (leaving the country without its most effective security force and putting more than 400,000 Iraqis out of work) and an aggressive “de-Ba’athification” program (stripping the country of its administrators and professional workforce – forced to join the Ba’ath party as a condition of employment – and contributing to further unemployment).³⁰ From the period of mid-2003 to mid-2006, the Iraqi people drafted and ratified a new constitution, elected a representative government, and approved and installed a new cabinet and Prime Minister. The new Iraqi government, supported by a multi-national military force, was unable to contain the insurgency (based on

29. U.S. Department of State, "*Background Note: Iraq*," March 8, 2010.

30. Donald Wright and Timothy Reese, "*On Point II: Transition to the New Campaign*", (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, June 2008), 91-96.

sectarian strife and supported by Iran, Syria and other violent non-state actors) and its attendant violence, prompting an additional surge of forces in the summer of 2006. This effort was successful in providing security for the nascent Iraqi government as it attempted to assuage ethnic and political differences – leading to a marked reduction in violence and a return to near pre-war stability in the nation.³¹

General David Petraeus, then-commander of Multi-National Forces, Iraq and current commander of U.S. Central Command, outlined a series of concepts that can be taken away from the U.S. experience in Iraq. Petraeus offered four broad imperatives – “Focus on the People” (understanding the people, culture, and social structures as well as the underlying support systems in order to secure the population), “Work Across Boundaries (advocating a “whole of government” approach to COIN in addition to expanding intelligence capabilities), “Exercise Initiative” (in order to ‘get out in front’ of the enemy), “Learn and Adapt” (identify, analyze, and share best practices), and lastly, “Live Our Values” (to enhance the legitimacy of our efforts). Strikingly similar to the points outlined by General McChrystal, these lessons also seem to mirror Galula’s long-held principles. Many Operational commanders in Iraq agree that getting back to the basics of COIN (as articulated by Galula) – protecting and controlling the population, winning their support, and isolating the population from the insurgency – were key factors in the coalition’s success.³² Now that we have laid the basis for our discussion with the preceding four examples, the next section will examine the last two prongs of our COIN question – does a shift in insurgent motivation

31. U.S. Department of State, “*Background Note: Iraq*,” March 8, 2010.

32. James Crider, “A View From Inside the Surge”, (Military Review, March-April 2009: 81-88). See also Dale Kuehl, “*The People Are the Key*”, (Military Review, March-April 2009: 72-80).

demand different operational planning considerations, and is current doctrine reflective of these new elements?

DISCUSSION

“You cannot fight former Saddamists and Islamic extremists the same way you would have fought the Viet Cong, Moros, or Tupamaros.”

—U.S. Army Doctrine
FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency

As a guide to the analysis of historical and contemporary COIN doctrine, we should remember Professor O’Neill’s definition of Traditionalist insurgencies – groups that “seek to restore a political system from the recent or distant past.”³³ In the two contemporary (21st Century) large-scale insurgencies this paper offers, the desired political structure is a return to an historical 8th century Pan-Arabic caliphate across the Middle East (into Indonesia and Malaysia as well) and the imposition of extreme *sharia* law. This radical ideology (and the insurgencies it breeds) represents one of the largest unconventional threats to U.S. national security.³⁴

The central argument in support of the notion that a change in the nature or basis of the conflict would demand a change in planning is the inclusion of a number of “Contemporary Imperatives” to FM 3-24. The inclusion of these elements in current doctrine is because of lessons learned from the preceding two conflicts.³⁵ Per this new imperatives, operational planners are to “Manage Information and Expectations” (for the local population, coalition military partners, and the at-large international community), “Use the Appropriate Level of Force” (in order to reduce the impact on local populations and retain a “local face” on the conflict), “Learn and Adapt” (each COIN conflict is unique and dynamic), “Empower

33. O’Neill, 21.

34. “*Quadrennial Defense Review*.” (Washington, DC: U.S. Government, Feb 12, 2010), vi.

35. FM 3-24, 1-24.

the Lowest Levels (to encourage the aforementioned initiative from subordinate commands), and “Support the Host Nation” (to emphasize the transition to a stable government).³⁶ These imperatives, along with the previously mentioned historical principles of COIN, are mirrored in JP 3-24 (issued in October 2009). In keeping with the “Learn and Adapt” imperative, COIN doctrine continues to evolve, though one could reasonably argue that these changes could also be due to the natural maturation of COIN doctrine (as a function of greater experience) rather than solely a result of a shift in insurgent ideology.

Critics of current COIN doctrine make several arguments: first, that much of the doctrine is based on only a few historical insurgencies that bear only a passing resemblance to the ethno-religious insurgencies the country is likely to face in the future, second, that the doctrine inadequately addresses the insurgent’s use of information operations (combined with reflexively antagonistic media coverage), and last, that contemporary COIN doctrine is largely silent on the strategic and operational implications that a religiously-motivated insurgency may present.³⁷ The foundation of this paper is based on the first criticism – that COIN doctrine is largely based on lessons derived from COIN operations during the French-Algerian War and U.S. experiences in Vietnam. While the doctrine been updated to include lessons from recent insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, it mostly ignores historically successful alternative (and more militaristic) approaches to COIN, instead favoring a softer strategy of “winning hearts and minds”.³⁸

36. FM 3-24, 1-24 to 1-26.

37. Ralph Peters, "Getting Counterinsurgency Right", (New York Post, December 20, 2006). See also Steven Metz and Raymond Millen, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response", A Monograph. November 2004. See also Hoffman.

38. Peters, 1.

As to the second criticism regarding IO and media – the recently released JP 3-24 goes to great lengths to discuss Information Operations in support of COIN, particularly the importance of an aggressive Public Affairs effort:

“Clear, accurate portrayals can improve the effectiveness and morale of counterinsurgents, reinforce the will of the US public, and increase popular support for the HN government. The right messages can reduce misinformation, distractions, confusion, uncertainty, and other factors that cause public distress and undermine COIN efforts. Constructive and transparent information enhances understanding and support for continuing operations against the insurgency.”³⁹

It may be that antagonistic media coverage of military operations has more to do with a difference in political ideology (between the media and the administration) and, if so, would make consideration of this element (at the operational level) effectively moot. In a larger sense, the importance of Information Operations in support of the COIN effort cannot be overstated – a noted COIN warfare expert suggests, “Insurgent campaigns have shifted from military campaigns supported by information operations to strategic communications campaigns supported by guerrilla and terrorist operations”.⁴⁰

The final criticism deserves greater discussion as COIN theorists have identified a number of emerging issues directly related to the ethno-religious nature of future insurgencies that the commander should consider in future COIN planning. The first such issue is that contemporary COIN doctrine “assume[s] that the target population has a value system similar to America’s, or fundamental concepts regarding political order that are consistent with that of a representative democracy, universal individual rights, and free market economies.”⁴¹ Indeed, it may be that the oft-embraced strategy of “winning hearts

39. JP 3-24, VI-13.

40. T.X. Hammes, “*Fourth Generation Warfare Evolves, Fifth Emerges*,” *Military Review*, May/June 2007, 17.

41. Hoffman, 78.

and minds” is only applicable to a small subset of insurgencies.⁴² In the case of a religiously inspired insurgency attempting to overthrow a government in an effort to return to the historic Pan-Islamic caliphate, reality (rather than assumptions) may dictate an entirely different COIN strategy⁴³.

The second emerging issue is the transnational support that many latter-day Traditionalist insurgent groups enjoy. In the Iraq and Afghanistan insurgencies, the main insurgent effort was supported by a variety of external actors – other allied groups, fighters from neighboring states sympathetic to the insurgency, as well as strong diasporic elements. Increasingly, transnational terrorist groups have been able to disassociate from state sponsors through the pursuit of independent means of financing (generally through charitable donations, extortion, smuggling, and other crimes).⁴⁴ Once the insurgent group is no longer dependent on the local population for funding and support, they may feel free to engage in more extreme methods to achieve their goals.⁴⁵

The final emerging issue is the increasingly urban nature of future conflicts. Frank G. Hoffman, a national security affairs expert, notes that “demographic trends and the operational dynamics associated with a number of irregular forces around the globe point to an increase in urban conflicts”⁴⁶ Insurgents are like bank robbers – they go where the money (and people) are. This urban setting confers several advantages to the insurgent – concealment, sanctuary, resources, anonymity, and “lucrative targets”⁴⁷ – while making the COIN effort more challenging.

42. Metz and Millen, 34.

43. Cronin, 41.

44. *"Monograph on Terrorist Financing."* Washington, DC: National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, August 28, 2004.

45. Morgan, 37.

46. Hoffman, 76.

47. Ibid.

The preceding discussion has revealed that COIN doctrine has evolved based on U.S. experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan and that while the doctrine is comprehensive – JP 3-24 is nearly 250 pages long – there are additional items (the culture of the population, the global nature of insurgent support, the urban setting for future conflicts) that commanders should consider when planning for future COIN operations.

CONCLUSIONS

Over the last decade, U.S and coalition forces have conducted COIN operations in support of a number of military campaigns, primarily in Iraq and Afghanistan. The nature of these insurgencies (the motivations and political aims of the insurgent groups) has demanded a reexamination of contemporary COIN doctrine. This paper has established that much of U.S. COIN doctrine was based on effective practices used against Egalitarian and Secessionist insurgencies in Algeria and Vietnam and that the doctrine has evolved to encompass many of the lessons learned from contemporary Traditionalist insurgencies. This paper concludes with three issues—directly related to the religious nature of future conflicts—that operational commanders should consider in future COIN operations. In closing, the following observation from FM3-24 captures the evolutionary (and hopeful) nature of that doctrine: “In COIN, the side that learns faster and adapts more rapidly—the better learning organization—usually wins”.⁴⁸

48. FM 3-24, ix.

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